

Rules of the Game

Magical Oddities (Part Three)

By Skip Williams



Last week, we completed our look at spell preparation and considered spells that are cast without preparation. We also explored what a spellcaster knows when a spell's subject makes a successful saving throw. This week, we'll consider other kinds of spell failure. We'll also consider the effects of metamagic.

When Spells Fail

A successful saving throw isn't the only thing that foils a spell. Sometimes, a spellcaster knows when one of these other circumstances has prevailed and other times he does not. Here's an overview:

Antimagic: A spell's magical effects become nonfunctional within an area of antimagic, such as an *antimagic field*. When a spell is aimed into an area of antimagic from somewhere outside the area, the antimagic blocks line of effect for the spell and the spell most likely fails. If the spell doesn't produce any sort of visible display or manifestation that the caster (or other witness to the event) can perceive, then there's no clue as to why the spell failed or even that it has failed. If the blocked spell has a target entry, however, the caster will not note any failed or successful saving throws in response to the spell (see Part Two) and that in itself might alert the caster to something amiss.

If the spell's effects are visible (for example, a *lightning bolt* or *magic missile* spell -- at least when I'm the DM), the spell's visible effects stop where they meet the area of antimagic. Anyone who sees the spell being blocked can attempt a DC 26 Spellcraft check to realize that antimagic has blocked the spell.

When a spellcaster is inside an antimagic area, any spells she casts are suppressed. Such spells don't actually fail unless their durations are instantaneous. Spells with longer durations are suppressed until the caster somehow leaves the antimagic area (though time spent within the antimagic area counts against the spell's duration). If the caster isn't aware she's in an antimagic area, handle the situation in the same way you'd handle it if the caster has aimed a spell into the antimagic area from outside.

Arcane Spell Failure: Wearing armor or using a shield can interfere with an arcane spell that has a somatic component. Arcane spells that don't have somatic components, and divine spells of all kinds, are not subject to arcane spell failure.

When an arcane spellcaster fails an arcane spell failure roll, the spell fails and is completely wasted. Any material or XP components used in the spell also are wasted. No outwardly obvious sign indicates that the spell has failed due to an arcane spell failure roll (though the DM can create one as a house rule), but I recommend that the caster be aware of the failure immediately. The character realizes she has miscast the spell and probably feels the spell's power uselessly draining away.

Lapse in Concentration: A spell is completely ruined when any character has to make a Concentration check while casting a spell and fails the check. The spell is lost along with any material and XP component used in the

spell. In most cases, the caster is aware of the failed check, though in some instances a character might not notice. For example, a character must make a Concentration check whenever she fails a saving throw while casting a spell. If the saving throw was from a spell that has no obvious physical effects (see Part Two), then the affected character is not aware that a hostile spell has affected her. The DM should secretly make the required Concentration check (the DC is equal to the hostile spell's saving throw DC; see the Concentration skill description). If the Concentration check fails, the spell is ruined.

Misaimed Spell: A spell aimed at the wrong subject or place usually fails utterly. When a spell has a target entry, the caster must aim the spell at a target that can receive the spell. For example, a *magic missile* spell works only on creatures. If the caster aims a *magic missile* spell at an object (that is, anything that lacks a Charisma score and a Wisdom score), the spell fails. I recommend that DMs give the players no special clues about what's going on when a character misaims a spell. If something else is going on that might give a clue that a spell has failed, however, the caster still gets that clue. For example, a *charm person* spell works only when aimed at a humanoid. If someone aims a *charm person* effect at a giant, the spell fails. Because *charm person* also is a spell with a target entry, the caster will know if the target made a successful saving throw or not (see Part Two). In this example, the caster notes neither a successful nor a failed save.

Spell Resistance: When a subject has spell resistance, the caster must make a caster level check to overcome the resistance before the spell has any chance to take effect. I recommend that you handle the effects of spell resistance in the same way you handle saving throws. That is, when a targeted spell fails to overcome spell resistance, the caster knows what has happened.

When a spell has an effect or area entry and no obvious physical effects, the caster cannot tell if the spell overcame a subject's spell resistance (if any).

If a spell has an obvious physical effect, but has an effect or area entry, the caster might notice the spell's failure to overcome spell resistance by noting the absence of those effects. In some cases, the absence of such effects is fairly easy to notice. For example, the *burning hands* spell works at fairly short range and burns everything within the spell's area. It's fairly easy to notice when a foe has completely avoided all effects from the flames. In other cases, a DC 15 Spot check might be in order (remember that a -1 penalty applies to a Spot check for each 10 feet of distance between the observer and the subject).

Subject Immune to the Spell: Immunity to spells works just like spell resistance that the spell cannot defeat. Follow the guidelines for spell resistance when a spell fails due to the subject's immunity.

Metamagic

The various metamagic feats allow spellcasters to adjust their spells in various ways. In earlier versions of the **D&D** game, metamagic was available in the form of spells that altered other spells. The current game uses feats instead.

The rules governing metamagic feats are detailed on see page 88 in the *Player's Handbook*. Several aspects of metamagic can prove troublesome in play. Here's an overview, along with some commentary.

- You can use most metamagic feats on spells you instinctively or spontaneously cast.

Applying a metamagic feat to such a spell increases the spell's casting time to a full-round action (or adds a full-round action to the casting time if it's normally longer than a standard action). The casting time

increase makes applying the Quicken Spell feat a waste of effort (and a waste of a higher-level spell slot).

As noted in the *Player's Handbook*, casting a spell as a full-round action is not the same as casting a spell with a casting time of 1 full round. For example, a sorcerer applies the Silent Spell feat to *charm person* spell. The spell's casting time increases from a standard action to a full-round action. The spell takes effect during the same turn that the sorcerer cast the spell. If the same sorcerer casts a *summon monster I* spell, that spell doesn't take effect until the turn after the sorcerer casts the spell (just prior to the sorcerer's next turn). If our example sorcerer applies the Silent Spell feat to her *summon monster I* spell, the spell's casting time would be 1 full round plus a full-round action. The spell takes effect on the round after the sorcerer first cast the spell, but not until the sorcerer uses a full-round action to complete it.

- You can apply several metamagic feats to a single spell.

You cannot, however, apply the same metamagic feat to a single spell more than once.

When adding several different metamagic feats to a single spell, add up the required level increases to determine what level spell slot is required for the enhanced spell. The *Player's Handbook* uses an example of a *charm person* spell modified with Still Spell and Silent Spell. Each of the example feats requires a spell slot one level higher than normal, so the modified spell requires a 3rd-level spell slot.

- A spell modified with metamagic functions at its normal spell level, even though it requires a spell slot of higher level than normal.

Using our previous example of a *charm person* spell placed into 3rd-level spell slot because of metamagic, the spell functions as a 1st-level spell in all respects. If a wizard with an Intelligence score of 11 casts the spell, the saving throw DC is 11 (10 + 1 [spell level] + 0 [Intelligence modifier]). The wizard can cast the modified spell even though his Intelligence score is only 11, which is sufficient for a 1st-level spell but not for a 3rd-level spell. All other variables or characteristics that depend on the example spell's level, such as its ability to penetrate a *minor globe of invulnerability* effect, function at the spell's original level (1st).

The Heighten Spell feat is an exception to the foregoing. When increasing a spell with the Heighten Spell feat, the spell functions at its increased level. For example a *charm person* spell heightened to 3rd level has a base save DC of 13, requires a relevant ability score of at least 13, and functions as a 3rd-level spell in all other respects.

What's Next?

That concludes our look at spell failure and metamagic. Next week, we'll conclude the series by considering a perennial troublesome magical effect: polymorphing.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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